OL 241 Assignment Four Discussion
Online Learning. OL 241 How to Write a Community Climate Action Plan:
https://csd-i.org/climate-change/climate-change-action-plan-241/
Center for Sustainable Development: https://csd-i.org

This week's resources:
Assignment Four Homework
Magee Example Project Assignment Four

Assignment Four. Will your theory of a solution work?
Investigating if there is a scientific basis that our proposed theory and activities have worked on other projects.
Suppose that you are a mother whose children are suffering, and an unknown organization came to you with a plan to help your children. Wouldn't you want that plan to work?

Suppose that you are a donor hoping that your donations will fulfill some need. Wouldn't you want your donations to have a positive impact?

Suppose that you were a local nonprofit hoping to improve the lives of your community members. Wouldn't you want to be successful?

Today it is acknowledged that nonprofit programs haven't kept up with increasing need. One of the very simple reasons is that organizations are copying what other organizations are doing without stopping to check if the other organizations' programs are working and having any lasting impact.

There is an extraordinarily simple solution to this and that is to do a bit of research to see if any scientific studies have been done about the effectiveness of your proposed activities. For those of us who are human beings, this can be quite challenging. We think something will work, we fall in love with the idea, we become obsessed with the idea, and we won't let go of it. But what if 100 other organizations have tried the idea, evaluators have evaluated the outcomes, and unfortunately came to the conclusion that the intervention/activity did not address the project's challenges nor the needs of the communities.

So, at this early stage, before you fall in love with your idea, you have the opportunity to research whether there is a basis in scientific evidence that it works.

Both universities and forward thinking organizations monitor projects in an effort to determine if they are achieving their desired impact. The results of those studies are available online.

So in this week's assignment, you will take your two favorite programs, and search the Internet to see if scientists have found evidence that your chosen programs work to solve a challenge that we identified.

Searching for information on your proposed activities is a bit of an art. Right now, this instant, open up a Word document and save it under your program's name (as I did for my example project) 'Key Words for Groundwater Recharge Program.' Every time that you search for something on the Internet with a set of keywords that perform well for you, add them to your 'Key Words for Groundwater Recharge Program' document and save them. Frequently, you will find in scientific documents a list of keywords which authors used for themselves to research their studies. Save those too. Soon, you will have an arsenal of keywords that will make you into an expert of searching for scientific documents.

What is a scientific, peer-reviewed, document?
A cornerstone idea behind science is that investigators don't let their personal thoughts, feelings and needs muddle the results of their investigation. One of the techniques for ensuring that is to share a draft of their study with their scientific peers. If their peers feel that a scientist has not kept an arms length distance in their analysis, they will recommend corrections. This becomes known as a peer-reviewed study. It is these studies that we are looking for.

Search Engines
If you are connected to a university these studies will be easy to find. Universities subscribe to scientific search engines which are programmed to find scientific studies.

But let's look at Google for a moment. With a good collection of keywords, Google is tremendously powerful and can lead you to many papers that are freely downloadable online. Make sure that they're from a reputable university or research institute.

Google Scholar
Google also has a search engine called Google Scholar which only connects to scientific documents: a gold mine.

These documents will give you an abstract or executive summary that will tell you in one paragraph the results of the study. The body of the study will give you the information on why the activity did or did not work and under what circumstances. The circumstances are very important because you may discover that your proposed activity may not work in some situations—but will work perfectly in a different situation. Make sure that your proposed activity has shown evidence of having worked in your situation.

What if you find evidence that your proposed activity doesn't work? Analyze if the problem entails a minor modification to the activity (which you may be able to do). Otherwise, search for new activities that will work that you haven't thought of yet. I use plain English in Google in these situations and have had good luck. For example, for my project I used: "Is there evidence that street trees reduce urban heat?" This brought forth a gold mine of information.

Good luck!

To get started, go to: Assignment Four Homework